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Central Intelligence Bulletin

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20 November 1969

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Vietnam: The North Vietnamese may soon make sizable ground attacks directly against South Vietnamese Special Forces camps in the central highlands.

During the past few days, a series of reports from prisoners has revealed Communist plans to press the campaign in the Bu Prang - Duc Lap area. One prisoner said that the main attacks will not come until early December.

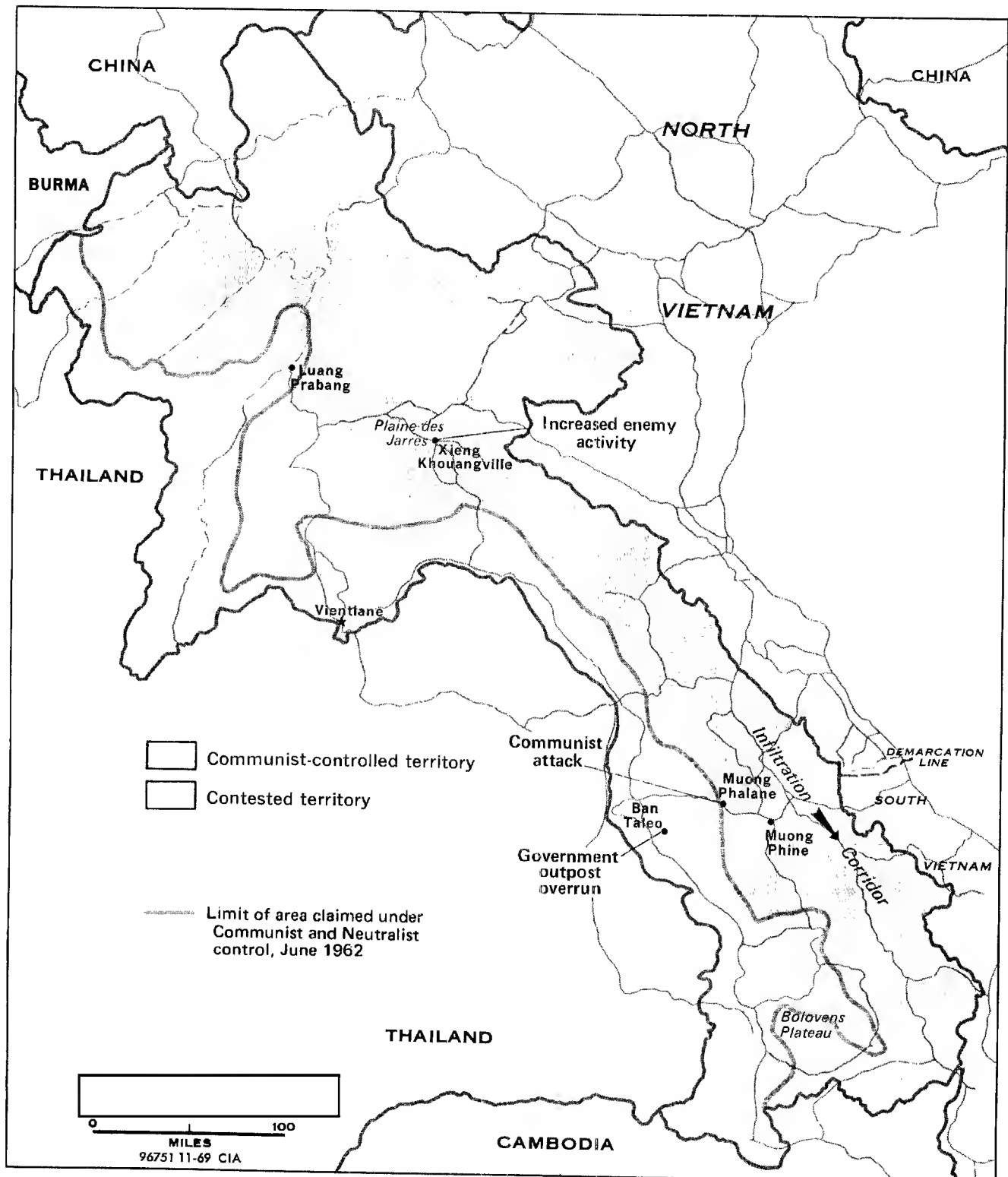
It appears most likely that the North Vietnamese will not risk an all-out assault, but will gradually heighten pressure on the South Vietnamese who have taken over the defense of this area. The Communists committed considerably greater forces during a siege of Duc Lap a year ago and still failed to take the camp. Allied air strikes were decisive in breaking the siege at Duc Lap, and extensive air support of the South Vietnamese ground units is causing enemy losses to mount.



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Laos: Current Situation



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Laos: Communist attacks are on the increase near the infiltration corridor in the south and the Plaine des Jarres in the north.

On 19 November a North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao force of several battalions attacked the government support base at Muong Phalane in the southern panhandle. Preliminary reports indicate that although the government has been able to hold off the attackers, heavy fighting is continuing on the outskirts of the village. Farther west the enemy had more success as local defenders retreated in the face of an attack on a small government outpost at Ban Taleo.

These Communist actions are probably intended to ensure the security of the infiltration corridor as the flow of supplies to South Vietnam begins to pick up during the dry season. It is likely that the enemy move was designed to counter government operations in the infiltration corridor that went as far as Muong Phine in early September. That was the deepest government penetration into Communist supply lines in several years.

In the north, Communist forces have recently made several sharp attacks against government outposts in the Xieng Khouangville area. The heaviest fighting has been concentrated near the airstrip, which has changed hands several times.

The Communists have thus far avoided large-unit operations, probably because of supply difficulties and their vulnerability to air strikes. Nevertheless, their attacks are taking an increasingly heavy toll of the government's already dangerously thin ranks. The loss of some government positions near Xieng Khouangville does not immediately endanger the government's hold over the Plaine des Jarres. The increased fighting, however, does appear to signal the opening round of the enemy's attempt to regain this politically important area.

(Map)

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USSR: During their visit to the US last month, cosmonauts Feoktistov and Beregovoy confirmed Soviet emphasis on automatic systems in manned spacecraft.

Most Soviet-manned spacecraft operations are automatically controlled, and consequently the crews undergo less training in control of the spacecraft than US astronauts. For Beregovoy's one-man mission in Soyuz 3, he was selected only one month in advance from a group of six who trained for that flight. The Soviets do not have over-all mission simulators and the complexity and sophistication of US training devices surprised them.

They also mentioned that there are a total of 52 cosmonauts in training. This is about the same number as are in the US program.

Feoktistov, believed to be the chief Soviet spacecraft designer, confirmed that cosmonauts are observers and experimenters rather than pilots. He reiterated the Soviet view that the cosmonauts should not be "burdened" with the control of the spacecraft, but should be free to conduct scientific observations. He admitted that the Soviets had underestimated the value of the human in control of spacecraft, but said that Soyuz spacecraft would have to be redesigned if the cosmonauts were to be given greater flight control.

Beregovoy admitted that he had trouble adapting to weightlessness on his Soyuz 3 flight in October 1968 and could not complete simple psychological tests immediately after entering orbit. He implied, however, that the major reason for his failure to dock with Soyuz 2 was a malfunction in the automatic docking system.

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USSR-Albania: [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Soviet representatives in Belgrade and Bucharest have been seeking contacts with Albanian missions there, as well as sounding out both the Yugoslavs and Romanians on developments in Albania. [REDACTED]

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In the past, Soviet propagandists have paid lip service to their willingness to talk things over with the Albanians. They have recently tried, with some success, to tidy up relations with another East European maverick, Yugoslavia. They may now have some hope that the isolated Albanians, perhaps influenced by the current Sino-Soviet talks, would be willing to consider some movement toward "normalization."

The Hoxha regime has so far given no sign that this would be the case, although the Albanians as well as the Soviets may see reasons for lowering the present level of antagonism. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] diplomats in Tirana expect some new Albanian foreign policy initiatives. If Tirana is ready to seek a substitute for its heavy dependence on Peking, it is likely to focus first on European countries other than the USSR. [REDACTED]

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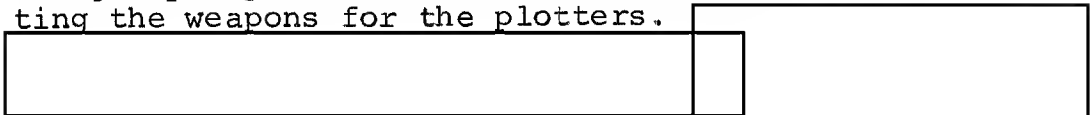
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Ethiopia: Security authorities have nipped a plot to assassinate Emperor Haile Selassie.

From the few details available, the conspirators focused their attention solely on killing the Emperor and the evidence so far does not point to a detailed plan to overturn the government. The ringleader was Takele Wolde Hawariat, a former high official of the Supreme Court who has long disliked the Emperor. He was killed by police last Sunday, presumably while resisting arrest. Takele, an inveterate plotter, had been under surveillance and detention off and on over the past several years. He had been spared more severe punishment by the Emperor because of his record as a resistance fighter against the Italians.

Only one other conspirator, a minor official, has been clearly identified, although some army officers may also be involved. The investigation of the plot was touched off by the theft of weapons from army stores in Addis Ababa. The authorities are now seeking two field-grade officers who were allegedly implicated and were responsible for getting the weapons for the plotters.



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Yemen - Saudi Arabia: Yemen has carried out at least one bombing attack against targets in Saudi Arabia.

Yemeni aircraft bombed two Saudi towns near the Yemen border on 13 November and allegedly struck one again on Monday. The raids apparently did little material damage, but resulted in a number of wounded and possibly some killed.

These attacks come after the renewal in late summer of fighting between royalist and republican forces in northern Yemen. They may be Yemen's answer to the recent resumption of Saudi aid to Royalist forces and the subsequent royalist counteroffensive.

Further sporadic raids may continue. The Saudis are naturally unhappy over the raids and are thinking of ways to retaliate. Their options are limited, however, and one of the few available means would be to increase Saudi aid to the royalists.



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Congo (Brazzaville): President Ngouabi's reaction to an amateurish coup plot earlier this month is likely to generate more trouble for his government.

The plot has been used to justify extensive changes in civilian and military posts, including those in the key defense and interior ministries. In addition, Ngouabi has announced a thorough restructuring of the government, abolished all laws regulating the civil service and the military, and decreed that armed vigilante brigades be created to root out "subversives."

Ngouabi's attacks on the plotters and their "reactionary" supporters have contained strong tribal overtones, with signs that the large and important Lari tribe will be the chief victim. The raising of tribal tensions could have serious consequences for the government, which is already beset by opposition from other important tribal groups.

The immediate effects of Ngouabi's panicky response to the plot will be heightened confusion, particularly in the military and the civil service. The new vigilante groups will add to the fears of the populace, which has suffered from the unchecked activities of similar groups in the past. Over the longer term, the changes seem certain to weaken the already unstable administration and further alienate the tribal opposition.

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Afghanistan: Prime Minister Etemadi's new cabinet, announced Monday, represents a greater personnel turnover than expected.

The freshman members are generally youthful, Western-educated, and competent. It remains to be seen, however, whether they will be able to push important programs through the conservative new parliament.

The brightest stars of the cabinet are in noneconomic posts. The health, interior, and education ministries have gone to highly respected and capable men. The cabinet's economic contingent, however, has lost some of its most forceful members. Although their replacements are qualified, experienced men who may work well as a team, there is no strong leader among them to act promptly on a meaningful economic program. There is little hope that the prime minister, who is indecisive and cautious, will be willing or able to fill this void.

The new parliament will vote on the new cabinet in about ten days. Such periods of parliamentary debate have at times in the past been the occasion for dissident demonstrations, and antigovernment agitators may try to stimulate public protests. Barring unforeseen developments, however, the cabinet is expected to win approval.

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Nigeria: Large numbers of federal troops rioted throughout yesterday in the suburbs of Lagos, as a result of a local hassle involving the death of a soldier. Other army units were moved in to try to quell the disturbances, which extended over a large area. Most of the rioters were unarmed, but some had guns and one army officer reportedly was shot. So far these developments have not spread to important federal government offices, including General Gowon's headquarters, which are located on an island just off the mainland. The riots evidently were not organized and have no political motivation.

* * * *

Czechoslovakia-Cuba: Czechoslovak Airlines (CSA) has started monthly flights between Prague and Havana following suspension of weekly service earlier this year. Flights are scheduled through March 1970 using a Soviet IL-62 jet transport. This run will provide CSA with experience in flying the IL-62 on a trans-Atlantic route before it begins scheduled service from Prague to New York next May. Cubana Airlines, which has been flying the Havana-Prague run on a scheduled weekly basis, is expected to continue its flights.

* * * *

Venezuela: Student disturbances have flared up again. Troops occupied the university in Merida early yesterday after a day of violence in which 29 police were injured. One student was found dead, but the cause of his death is not known at this time. A "peaceful" student protest tomorrow to commemorate Student Day could lead to more trouble.

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